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An Address by Jonas Mekas
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When I was asked to accept the highest award of the Philadelphia College of Art, I hesitated for a moment. I said to myself: who am I? Really, I haven't done much in my life. Everything I want to do, all my dreams, are still in the future. Then I thought again. What the College is really doing by awarding this honor to me, is directing people's attention to the avant garde arts.

This award doesn't, really, go to me; it goes to the new cinema—to all those avant garde artists who are trying to bring some beauty into a world full of sadness and horror. What are we really doing? Where are we—the Underground? What's the meaning of it all? I will try to answer, or to indicate, some of the meanings connected with our work—meanings that are closely connected with all of us.

There was a time, when I was sixteen or seventeen, when I was idealistic and believed that the world would change in my own lifetime. I read about all the suffering of man, wars and misery that took place in the past centuries. And I somehow believed that in my own lifetime all this would change. I had faith in the progress of man, in the goodness of man. And then came the war, and I went through horrors more unbelievable than anything I had read in the books, and it all happened right before my eyes—before my eyes the heads of children were smashed with bayonets. And this was done by my generation. And it's still being done today, in Vietnam, by my generation. It's done all over the world, by my generation. Everything that I believed in shook to the foundations—all my idealism, and my faith in the goodness of man and progress of man; all was shattered. My mind went to pieces. I went through a terrible time. Somehow, I managed to keep myself together. But, really, I wasn't one piece any longer; I was one thousand painful pieces.

It's really from this, and because of this, that I did what I did. I felt I had to start from the very beginning. I had no faith, no hope left. I had to collect myself again, bit by bit. And I wasn't surprised when, upon my arrival in New York, I found others who felt as I felt. There were poets, and film-makers, and painters—people who were also walking like one thousand painful pieces. And we felt that there was nothing to lose any more. There was almost nothing worth keeping from our civilized inheritance. Let's clean ourselves out, we felt. Let's clean out everything that is dragging us down—the whole bag of horrors and lies and egos. The Beat Generation was the outgrowth, the result of this desperation; the mystical researches came out of this desperation. No price was too high, we felt, to pay for this cleaning job, no embarrassment too big to take. Let them laugh at us and our shabby appearances; let them spit into our beards. Even if we had nothing—some of us still have nothing to put in the cleared place—we couldn't remain as we were. We had to clean out not only the present but, through the drug experience or through meditation, to go back by several generations, to eliminate our egos, our bad faith, our mistrust, our sense of competition, of personal profit—so that if there was anything beautiful and pure, it would find a clear place and would settle in us and would begin to grow. It was a painful search, and it still is. We are still in the beginning of this search and growth, and many minds get broken to pieces. We are going through a dramatic end of the Christian Era and the birth of what we begin to call the Aquarian Age, and there are violent happenings taking place in man's spirit and they aren't always in our control. But it's a little bit easier because there are today many of us in various places of the country, of the world;

we keep meeting each other, and we recognize each other; we know we are the traveling pioneers of the new age. We are the transitional generations. My generation, your generation, we have been marked by the sign of travel. We kept going and searching (we still do) in constant movement, from one side of the continent to another, between San Francisco and New York, between India and Mexico, and through all the inner journeys of the psychedelics and yoga systems, and macrobiotics. No generation since Columbus has travelled more than the current two generations of America. Yes, other generations have also travelled, but they always travelled as conquerors, to conquer the others, to teach them their own way of life. Our parents are still traveling through Vietnam as conquerors; they travel, yes—but how useless and unreal all their journeys and their conquerings seem to us today! For we are traveling, collecting the broken bits and pieces of knowledge, of love, of hope, of old ages; not the wisdom of our parents, not our mothers' wisdom, but that wisdom which is as old as the earth, as the planets, as man himself—the mystical, the eternal—collecting, gathering ourselves bit by bit, having nothing to offer to others but taking gladly whatever is invested with love and warmth and wisdom, no matter how little that may be. In cinema, this search is manifested through abandoning of all the existing professional, commercial values, rules, subjects, techniques, pretensions. We said: we don't know what man is; we don't know what cinema is. Let us, therefore, be completely open. Let us go in any direction. Let us be completely open and listening, ready to move to any direction upon the slightest call, almost like one who is so tired and weary, whose senses are like a musical string, almost with no power

of our own, blown and played by the mystical winds of the incoming Age, waiting for a slightest motion or call or sign—Let's go in any direction to break out of the net that is dragging us down. Our mothers' wisdom! Don't get tied down to any of the establishments; they will go down and they will drag us down. The sun, that is our direction. The beauty, that is our direction—not money, not success, not comfort, not security, not even our own happiness, but the happiness of all of us together.

We used to march with posters protesting this and protesting that. Today, we realize that to improve the world, the others, first we have to improve ourselves; that only through the beauty our own selves we can beautify the others.

Our work, therefore, our most important work at this stage is on ourselves. Our protest and our critique of the existing order of life can be only through the expansion of our own being. We are the measure of all things. And the beauty of our creation, of our art, is proportional to the beauty of ourselves, of our souls.

You may be wondering, sometimes, why we keep making little movies, underground movies, why we are talking about Home Movies, and you hope, sometimes, that all this will change soon. Wait, you say, until they begin making big movies, real movies. But we say, No, there is a misunderstanding here. We *are* making real movies. What we are doing comes from the deeper needs of man's soul. Man has wasted himself outside himself; man has disappeared in his projections. We want to bring him down, into his small room, to bring him home. We want to remind him that there is such a thing as home, where he can be, once and a while, alone and with himself and with a few that he loves close to him, and be with himself and his soul—that's the meaning of the

home movie, the private visions of our movies. We want to surround this earth with our home movies. Our movies come from our hearts—our little movies, not the Hollywood movies. Our movies are like extensions of our own pulse, of our heartbeat, of our eyes, our fingertips; they are so personal, so unambitious in their movement, in their use of light, their imagery. We want to surround this earth with our film frames and warm it up—until it begins to move. We could continue expressing our own surroundings, being mirrors of the dirty cities, the black dailiness. But we have done that job already. There is pain in the arts of the last few decades. The whole period of so-called modern art is nothing but the pain of our ending civilization, the last decades of the Christian Era. Now we are looking, we are being pulled by a desire for something beautiful deep within us, deep in the stars, and we want to bring it down to earth so that it will change our cities, our faces, our movements, our voices, our souls—we want an art of light. You'll see more and more of luminous colors and heavenly sounds coming through our art. The brush strokes will be charged with a different energy, not to express our egos, not to promote ourselves "as artists" (that is gone, all that is gone and gone), but to bring down the whispers of heaven to serve as strings, as instruments of mystical winds, with our own personalities almost disappearing. I see it all over the country, and humble, unknown artists keep coming from various and distant countries, passing the town like monks stopping on their way somewhere, showing glimpses brought down from heaven. There is a renaissance, a spiritual renaissance coming upon us, and it's through artists that this new age is bringing to us its first voices and visions; it's their intuition that the eternity communicates with us, bringing a new knowledge,

new feelings. Let us then be very open to our art, to this new art, and to our work as artists.

This isn't time for lowering ourselves, but for being ready to sing the most beautiful note.

I was talking in the beginning about my own disillusionment after the war. Today, for the first time in a long time, I suddenly again begin to see the broken pieces of myself coming together. I am listening, very openly, with all my senses, with my eyes and ears open, and I begin to hear and see a new man emerging.

After fifteen years of disillusionment, slowly, during the last few months, I have gained again the belief and trust in man, and the knowledge that this *is* the generation that is building the bridge from horror to light. You, me—we are the one thousand painful pieces that are beginning to come together in one beautiful note. As if a completely new race of man were emerging on earth. Do you know what the rock 'n roll group called *The Birds* do with their money? They are making huge signs and putting them all along the roadsides of California, and the signs say one word: *Love*. And you drive and you see, among all the signs of commerce, this huge sign: *Love*. But our parents would say, this is crazy. You should put your money into the bank. That's the difference. That's what I mean. That's where we stand in 1966 and mid-summer.



Jonas Mekas is a film maker, movie critic and cinema lover whose rediscovery of the newest art has earned him the title of "patron saint of the New American Cinema." Mekas, in addition to writing a spirited column for the *Village Voice*, has produced two major films: *Guns of the Trees* (1961) and *The Brig* (1964); the latter won the Grand Prix de St. Mark at Venice as the best documentary. He has also produced two films in collaboration with his brother: *Double-Barreled Detective Story* and *Hallelujah the Hills*. In the summer of 1964 he organized the Expanded Film Festival in New York City. He is also the guiding hand for the Film-Makers' Cinematique, the Film-Makers' Cooperative, the New American Cinema Group, Inc., the Film Culture Non-Profit Corporation, and the magazine, *Film Culture*, all of which are devoted to developing cinema into the highest possible art.

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